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*First Stage
February 2 - March 17, 1932*

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THE WORLD DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE

First Stage, February 2 - March 17, 1932

by

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with the aid of the Research Staff of the Foreign Policy Association

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WHEN the Disarmament Conference resumed its labors at Geneva on April 11, it entered the second and perhaps the most decisive stage of its deliberations. The first stage, which began on February 2, and terminated on March 17, with a recess for the Easter holidays, was devoted largely to the task of organization and to exposition of the main theses of the sixty powers represented at the Conference. In view of the fact that the discussions are likely to continue for several months, it may be useful to review the proceedings to date and to analyze the policies set forth in the opening statements of the various countries.

Despite general recognition that the failure of the Conference would have extremely serious repercussions on the world-wide economic and political situation, little or no progress was recorded during the first stage regarding direct reductions and the issues of equality and security.¹ For this policy of caution, the French and German elections were held partly responsible.² Moreover, the attention of most of the states was early diverted from the task of disarmament to that

of attempting to arrest the Sino-Japanese conflict. The Swiss delegate, M. Motta, frankly confessed that:

"The drama now being played out in China is calling in question the efficacy of the pacific procedure set up by the League . . . If this procedure were found to be really achieving its object, our Conference would yield definite and valuable results. If, on the other hand, this procedure . . . proves powerless to influence the acts of governments or to control events, any measures we may take, however well meant, will prove vain . . ."

While the formal disarmament procedure barely progressed beyond the point of organization and a preliminary exchange of views, the parallel activities of the League Assembly, which met in March to deal with the Far Eastern crisis, had a direct bearing upon the work of the Conference and contributed, at the time of recess in March, to produce an atmosphere somewhat less pessimistic than that which prevailed at the outset.³ Nevertheless, apprehension over the situation in the Orient continued when the Conference resumed its work in April.

1. Cf. Louis de Brouckère, article in *Disarmament* (Geneva, The Disarmament Information Committee), Vol. II, No. 5, March 1, 1932.

2. Cf. Mildred S. Wertheimer and Vera M. Dean, "The Political Outlook in Germany and France," *Foreign Policy Reports*, Vol. VIII, No. 4, April 27, 1932.

3. League of Nations, Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, *Verbatim Record (revised) of the Eleventh Plenary Meeting*, Conf. D./P.V. 11 (1), p. 4. (Records of the meetings of the Conference will be cited hereafter by document number only.)

4. Cf. League of Nations, Special Session of the League Assembly, *Verbatim Record of the Plenary Meetings*, March 3-11, 1932.

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ORGANIZATION OF THE CONFERENCE

Before reviewing the principal questions discussed during the first stage, brief mention should be made of the organization of the Conference. The general direction of the work is in the hands of the president, Mr. Arthur Henderson, who was appointed by the Council of the League of Nations at its meeting in May 1931, when he was British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.⁵ He is assisted by a bureau—in effect a steering committee—composed of the president, fourteen vice presidents elected by the Conference, and the chairmen of the Conference's five principal commissions.

All the delegates of the participating powers are represented at the plenary sessions of the Conference, to which final decisions are referred. Preliminary discussion, however, is conducted in a General Commission and in the five Special Commissions set up to deal with particular subjects—political questions, land armaments, naval armaments, air armaments, and military expenditures. Every country is represented on each of these commissions by one delegate.⁶

Theoretically, questions of principle are debated at plenary sessions or meetings of the General Commission, while technical matters are referred to the Special Commissions. During the first stage, however, difficulties developed when the Special Commissions were asked to report on questions which had not yet been decided in principle by the General Commission.⁷ In an effort to clear up misunderstandings between the various commissions and to facilitate the work of the Conference, Mr. Gibson, acting head of the American delegation, secured the adoption of a resolution on March 16 providing that the General Commission, when it met again on April 11, "should sit continuously until such time as sufficient progress has been made in respect of decisions on questions of principle to allow the Special Commissions fruitfully to pursue their labors."⁸ As a result of this decision, the Conference is attempting to deal with vital questions of principle during the second stage of its deliberations.

5. Mr. Henderson was not chosen because of his official position at that time, and the appropriateness of his presidency was not seriously questioned after the fall of the British Labour government in September 1931.

6. The composition of the various agencies of the Conference is summarized in the Rules of Procedure, Conf. D. 44 (1) February 3, 1932.

7. The Air Commission, for example, when asked to study and report on the question of civil aviation, declared that this question "could not be usefully examined until a decision of principle had been taken by the General Commission." Cf. League of Nations, *Journal of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments* (hereafter cited as *Journal of the Conference*), No. 37, March 15, 1932, p. 285.

8. *Journal of the Conference*, cited, No. 39, March 17, 1932, p. 302.

In his opening speech, the president, Mr. Henderson, set forth the task of the Disarmament Conference under three heads:

"To arrive at a collective agreement on an effective program of practical proposals, speedily to secure a substantial reduction and limitation of all national armaments;

"To determine that no national armaments may be maintained outside the scope of that treaty by which all nations represented here are to make the achievement of universal disarmament their common aim;

"To ensure continuity of advance towards our ultimate goal, without detracting in any way from the fullest measure of success of our immediate effort, by planning the holding of similar conferences at reasonably short intervals of time."⁹

As the basis for its work, the Conference took the Draft Treaty for the World Disarmament Conference, completed by the Preparatory Commission in 1930 after nearly five years of arduous labor.¹⁰ The Draft Treaty was designed to provide a framework within which the limitation and reduction of armaments could be achieved. It provides methods but does not attempt to set up ratios or to define the strength of armies, navies and air forces. The Draft Treaty, moreover, was adopted subject to many reservations, some of vital importance, by the countries represented on the Preparatory Commission. Germany and the Soviet Union declined to accept the Draft Treaty and reserved the right to submit alternative proposals to the Disarmament Conference.¹¹

ABOLITION OF AGGRESSIVE ARMAMENTS

Perhaps the most unexpected development during the early months of the Conference was the prevailing sentiment in favor of total abolition of so-called "offensive" or "aggressive" weapons. This development was not entirely new. As Signor Grandi, the Italian Foreign Minister, pointed out, "limits were imposed on Germany and her former allies [in the Treaties of Peace] in pursuance of the idea of depriving the armed forces of those states of weapons that are particularly aggressive in character; and the primary object in view was the international organization of peace for which the way was then being paved and which the League was to accomplish."¹² The practical difficulties of defining "aggressive" and "offensive" weapons, however, led the Preparatory Commission, at its early meetings, to lay aside this method of approach.¹³

9. Conf. D./P.V.1 (1), p. 2.

10. Cf. William T. Stone, "The Draft Treaty for the World Disarmament Conference," Foreign Policy Association, *Information Service*, Vol. VI, No. 25, February 18, 1931.

11. In accepting the Draft Treaty as the basis for the work of the Conference, full liberty was reserved to all delegates to move amendments in the form of modifications, additions or omissions. (Cf. *Journal of the Conference*, cited, No. 21, February 25, 1932, p. 154.)

12. Conf. D./P.V.6 (1), p. 4.

13. Cf. League of Nations, Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference, *Report of Sub-Commission A*, C.739-M.278.1926.IX, p. 140-143.

During the first stage of the general discussion at Geneva, no less than twenty-seven countries supported either total abolition or the restriction of certain aggressive weapons. Italy, Germany, Spain, the Soviet Union and other states specified the weapons which they would be prepared to abolish. Italy, for example, favored abolition of heavy artillery of every kind, tanks, bombing aircraft, capital ships, submarines, aircraft carriers, and all chemical and bacteriological weapons.¹⁴ Spain formally proposed complete abolition of military aviation and all arms which a majority of the Conference deemed to be of an aggressive character.¹⁵ Sweden proposed abolition of heavy artillery tanks and all military aircraft.

Analysis of the proposals and statements made during the first stage of the Conference shows that 14 countries supported the abolition of heavy long-range artillery; 11 favored abolition of tanks; 13 abolition of bombing aircraft; 7 abolition of all military aircraft; 7 abolition of capital ships; 6 abolition of aircraft carriers; 10 abolition of submarines; 26 favored prohibition of chemical and bacteriological arms; while 8 expressly asked for prohibition of all preparation or manufacture of chemical products which might be employed in time of war.

During the first phase of the Conference, the United States and Great Britain were less precise than Italy, Germany, Spain and certain other countries in their general statements regarding the suppression of offensive weapons. The United States merely favored "special restrictions" for tanks and heavy mobile guns, while Great Britain mentioned only prohibition of mobile land guns in addition to submarines and poison gas.¹⁶ At the resumption of the negotiations on April 11, however, the American delegation strongly urged the abolition of tanks and heavy artillery, as well as poison gas.¹⁷ This proposal was supported by Great Britain and Italy among others.

The case for abolition of aggressive weapons is summed up by Lord Cecil, former head of the British delegation to the Preparatory Commission:

"Such are the arms [tanks, bombers, etc.], the presence of which in one country causes excusable mistrust among its neighbors. Why? Because they can only too easily be used for sudden attack; and a sudden onslaught before cooler counsels can prevail or the peace forces be mobilized is precisely the chief terror of modern warfare. There are certain other armaments which

ordinary men of good sense would not hesitate to put into the same category. There are the heavy howitzers and long-range artillery without which modern entrenched positions, manned with machine guns, are practically impregnable, as the tactical history of the Great War clearly proves . . . I know of no argument—certainly none was produced at the Preparatory Commission—which can be opposed to the thesis that the real security of any and every nation would be immensely increased by the simultaneous all-round abolition of these essentially aggressive weapons."¹⁸

Mr. Gibson's Statement of April 11

Mr. Gibson, in his statement on April 11, developed this thesis that abolition of offensive weapons would make armed invasion virtually impossible, and declared:

"A new war would see frontier fortifications rapidly demolished by heavy mobile artillery. Trench defenses with their barbed-wire entanglements necessary for linking up the intervals between fortifications would be effectively demolished by tanks and possibly after a gas attack the invading infantry would be able to advance with relative ease . . . The advantage of the abolition of these weapons is not only that it would relieve existing fears, but that it is in every way desirable, even from a strictly military point of view, in that the abolition of such weapons would restore the superiority of defense. With no existing cannon capable of destroying trench defense, with no gas to terrorize armies, invasion would demand such staggering sacrifices in human life as to make it far too costly to contemplate."¹⁹

French Opposition to American Thesis

The futility of seeking disarmament or security through the abolition of a few offensive weapons was forcefully argued by M. Tardieu in reply to Mr. Gibson. He declared, first, that it is difficult if not impossible to draw the line between aggressive and defensive weapons; and, second, that it is impossible for a country to defend itself without at some moment being compelled to undertake a counter-offensive.²⁰ In other words, the abolition of tanks and artillery, it is argued, will not diminish the intensity of warfare, but merely produce a stalemate preventing any decisive conclusion of the conflict. Thus the German and Allied armies were deadlocked for nearly four years during the World War. If the tank or a similar decisive weapon had not been discovered and the belligerents had found it possible to endure the strain, "the war might have lasted a hundred years."²¹

M. Tardieu, furthermore, contended that the prohibition of this or that weapon is useless because technicians will invent pocket cannons to take the place of big guns, pocket

18. Cf. Lord Cecil, "Abolish Aggressive Armaments," *Disarmament*, cited, Vol. II, No. 5, March 1, 1932.

20. *Journal of the Conference*, cited, No. 43, April 12, 1932.

21. *Ibid.*, No. 44, April 13, 1932, p. 347.

22. Major-General J. F. C. Fuller, "The Mechanization of Warfare," in *What Would be the Character of a New War?—Enquiry Organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union* (London, P. S. King, 1931), p. 56; cf. also Captain Liddell Hart, *The Remaking of Modern Armies* (New York, Little, Brown & Co., 1928).

14. *Survey of the Proposals made by Various Delegations during the General Discussions*, Conf. D.99, p. 33.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 49,54.

17. *Conference Journal*, No. 44, April 13, 1932, p. 341.

airplanes to replace bombers, and pocket cruisers to replace capital ships, and because, in the event of war, no nation would abstain from beating its farm tractors into tanks, its liners into battleships, and its civil airplanes into bombers.²³

It might be possible, M. Tardieu argued, to suppress offensive weapons, provided that the secret manufacture of certain types of guns and airplanes could be prevented, but this would require international control and penalties against violations. The only way to suppress certain arms, he concluded, is "to put them at the disposal of an international power," as proposed in the French plan.^{23a}

This contention that international control and the strict regulation of private manufacture of arms is essential to the effectiveness of any plan for prohibiting certain weapons was recognized by a number of countries. Germany, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, Spain and Norway submitted proposals for the supervision of the manufacture and trade in arms or the prohibition of imports and exports of war materials.²⁴

THE ISSUE OF EQUALITY

It is generally agreed that no convention for the reduction of armaments can advance international peace until the issue of equality between Germany and France is solved. Under the Treaty of Versailles, Germany is authorized to maintain a professional army of only 100,000 in comparison to a conscription army in France which today numbers about 651,000 peace time effectives.²⁵ Germany has invariably expressed hostility to any treaty which would perpetuate this French superiority.²⁶ France, on the other hand, has opposed the German demand for equality, on the ground that it would lead to revision of the peace treaties of 1919-1920 and the restoration of Germany's position in 1914.²⁷

At the final session of the Preparatory Commission, therefore, the French delegation served formal notice that France could

23. For a discussion of the time required to transform industry from a peace basis to a war footing and the necessity of controlling private manufacture of arms and new inventions, cf. Major Victor S. Lefebure, *Scientific Disarmament* (New York, Macmillan, 1931).

23a. On April 22 the Conference unanimously adopted a resolution favoring the principle of "qualitative disarmament" while reserving for future decision the question of whether aggressive weapons are to be abolished or internationalized.

24. Conf. D. 99, p. 17, 52, 86, 27 and 51.

25. Cf. William T. Stone, "The Burden of Armaments," *Foreign Policy Reports*, Vol. VII, No. 20, December 9, 1931.

26. Hans Wehberg, "Deutschlands Verlangen nach Gleicher militärischer Sicherheit," *Die Friedens Warte*, April 1931.

27. The principal difficulty lies in finding a basis for comparing the relative strength of the German professional army and the French system of conscription. Cf. Jacques Lyon, *Les Problèmes du Désarmement* (Paris, Bolvin & Co., 1931), Chapter II. For the relation of the abolition of conscription to the establishment of private armies in Germany, such as the Nazi Storm Troops, cf. Dr. W. Groener, "Die Abrüstungsbestimmungen von Versailles und die deutsche innere Politik," *Abrüstungszahlung*, *Zeitschrift für Politik*, March 1932.

sign no disarmament treaty which did not preserve "previous treaties under which certain of the High Contracting Powers have agreed to limit their land, sea or air armaments . . ."²⁸ Over the objection of Germany, an article (53) was incorporated in the Draft Treaty, the effect of which was to condition the acceptance of the disarmament agreement upon the maintenance of the limitations imposed in the Versailles Treaty and the other treaties of peace.²⁹

The French government, in the formal memorandum which it sent to the League of Nations on July 16, 1931, left no doubt as to its position. In this document, which reaffirmed the French thesis of security and disarmament, the French government solemnly declared:

"Should an attempt be made, for instance, in the name of a theoretical principle of equality, to modify the relative situation created by the provisions of Part V of the Peace Treaties, it would prove impossible to maintain the reductions already accomplished and still less practicable would become the general limitation of armaments."³⁰

Even in the conciliatory opening speeches of the Disarmament Conference, the equality question was raised. Thus the Austrian delegate, voicing the views of Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria, demanded:

"Are you going to ask us today, in spite of the promises you made, in spite of the legal equality of the members of the League, to perpetuate in a Convention freely accepted the legal inequality and inequality of security which you yourselves would refuse to accept?"³¹

Chancellor Brüning, for his part, warned that only measures "which strike at the very root of the problem of armaments can achieve the supreme purpose of this Conference, which is to guarantee to all states their right to an equal degree of security."³² Germany, he added, was prepared to work loyally toward this end, provided the same principles were imposed upon all nations.

While none of the disarmed states laid down uncompromising conditions or threatened to repudiate the military clauses of the Peace Treaties, they succeeded in making it clear that no treaty which did not recognize the equality of states, at least in principle, could secure universal application.

Except by implication, France and its allies did not reply to these arguments, and

28. League of Nations, Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference, *Minutes of Sixth Session, Second Part, Seventeenth Meeting*, C.4.M.4.1931.IX, p. 261.

29. This article was adopted by a majority of the Preparatory Commission, with the United States and Great Britain voting in favor of its incorporation because of their interest in preserving the Washington and London naval agreements.

30. League of Nations, *Particulars with Regard to the Position of Armaments in the Various Countries, Communication from the French Government*, C.440.M.187.1931.IX, p. 7.

31. Conf. D. 99, p. 14.

32. Conf. D./P.V. 5, p. 6.

the record of the opening debates affords no clear answer concerning the prospects for a solution of this difficulty. It has been suggested that France, in view of its apparent shift in foreign policy,³⁵ might admit the principle that all nations are entitled to equal treatment under the League Covenant, provided Germany would voluntarily engage not to exceed its present armaments until the next conference, or for a period of five or ten years. Such an agreement would give Germany legal equality at once and lay the basis for actual equality in the future, while giving France assurance that Germany would undertake no immediate campaign to revise the map of Europe.

THE FRENCH PLAN FOR LEAGUE POLICE FORCE

Whether France will consider any compromise regarding the question of equality or accept any drastic reduction in armaments apparently depends upon what action the Disarmament Conference takes on the proposal submitted on February 5 by M. Tardieu, head of the French delegation. The French proposal, which contains the same general idea advanced by the French delegates at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919,³⁶ declares:

"The present Conference offers the best opportunity that has ever occurred to make a definite choice between a League of Nations possessing executive authority and a League of Nations paralyzed by the uncompromising attitude of national sovereignty. France has made her choice. She suggests that the other nations should make theirs."³⁷

The French plan for vesting "executive authority" in the League was submitted in the form of a series of general proposals under which the League would have five categories of force at its disposal:³⁸

1. An international civil air transport service composed of commercial airplanes above a certain tonnage limit,³⁹ and operated in time of peace by continental, intercontinental or intercolonial organizations under League auspices.

2. An international military air force composed of airplanes above a certain tonnage limit.⁴⁰

3. Military aircraft⁴¹ placed at the disposal of the League in the event that Article 16 of the Covenant is applied against an aggressor, airplanes in this category to be permitted only to those countries which undertake to place them at disposal of the League.

4. An international police force composed of small land and naval contingents furnished by

³⁵ Cf. "The Political Outlook in Germany and France," cited.

³⁶ Cf. Paris Peace Conference, League of Nations Commission, Official French Plan for a League of Nations, Annex 2, Minutes of First Meeting.

³⁷ Conf. D. 99, p. 23.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁹ This limit was not fixed in the French plan, wherein the largest commercial airplanes which might be converted into bombers in time of war were to be placed under League Control.

⁴⁰ Not specified, but referring to bombing airplanes.

⁴¹ Military aircraft would be divided into three classes: large bombing planes composing the League air force; small planes belonging to individual states; intermediate planes al-

the contracting states. This force would be permanently available to the League at all times with freedom of passage to areas where a threat of war had arisen. The first contingent of punitive forces would be raised after the outbreak of a conflict and when the League had invoked Article 16, to repress war and bring immediate assistance to any state victim of aggression.

The French plan was not submitted as an alternative to the Draft Treaty, but as a supplementary proposal. M. Tardieu explained that France accepted the principle of limitation of armaments "unconditionally," but that the degree of reduction would depend upon the measures of security which the League was able to provide.⁴²

In short the French plan calls for the creation of a small League army, to be supplemented in time of need by national contingents. Moreover, bombing planes would be exclusively in League hands, and other aggressive weapons would be placed at the League's disposal.

The theory of a League police force, as outlined in the French proposals, is a logical development of the principle of sanctions already embodied in the League Covenant.⁴³ According to France, however, the present loose form of sanctions, emphasizing the economic measures prescribed in Article 16 of the Covenant, is inadequate to maintain peace unless supported by an international police force.⁴⁴ In the opinion of the French government, it is difficult at present to obtain the necessary degree of cooperation under the Covenant in times of emergency. In presenting his plan, M. Tardieu declared:

"... the Covenant has too often been interpreted along the lines of least resistance ... as long as the League is without means to secure the execution of its decisions it will always tend to shrink from taking decisions ... I ask you ... to heed the voice of France when she asserts that peace can never be assured until the fabric of the League has been strengthened in truth and in fact. I ask you also to heed her voice when, as a means to such strength, she asks you to begin by implementing the Covenant with the resources which implicitly it contains."⁴⁵

If the European states were able to rely upon a League of Nations police force, it is argued, they would consent to drastic reductions in their own military establishments.⁴⁶

The French plan attaches special importance to the internationalization of civil avia-

tioned only to those countries willing to place them at the disposal of the League in case of aggression.

⁴² Conf. D./P.V. 4, p. 9. M. Tardieu elaborated the official French view on security in an international radio interview with William Hard, the full text of which is published in *Le Temps*, April 10, 1932.

⁴³ The theory of sanctions cannot be discussed here; a symposium by Professor John Dewey and Raymond Leslie Buell on the principle of sanctions will be published in the near future in the F.P.A. pamphlet series.

⁴⁴ For an able discussion of the desirability of an international police force, cf. David Davies, *The Problem of the Twentieth Century* (New York, Putnam, 1931); also J. M. Spaight, *Pseudo-Security* (New York, Longmans Green, 1928).

⁴⁵ Conf. D./P.V. 4, p. 7-9.

⁴⁶ Cf. A. Zimmern, "What is a Super-State?" *Headway*, April 1932.

tion; in fact, France makes the entire project dependent upon the acceptance of this principle." The reason for this is clear: every attempt to limit military aviation in the past has failed because of the ease with which commercial airplanes may be converted for military purposes.⁴⁷ The creation of an international civil air transport service entrusted to continental or intercontinental organizations and operating under the auspices of the League would meet this difficulty. That is, an international company would not be interested in advancing the military ends of any single government, but would be primarily interested in maintaining commercial aviation even in time of war.⁴⁸ While it is unlikely that aviation firms in the Orient and the United States would enter into an international company, such a plan, it is believed, is by no means impossible for Europe. The idea is opposed by some elements in Germany, however, on the ground that an international organization would deprive Germany of its present superiority in civil aviation and weaken still further the war potential of the Reich.

Critics of the French plan for an international police point out that the force actually under League control would be too small to affect the international situation. Even in case of a European conflict in which the League had invoked Article 16, France would contribute to the first contingent of punitive forces only "a division of arms [about 20,000 men], a mixed group of aircraft and material for land warfare, with personnel and munitions."⁴⁹ As the present peace time strength of the French Army is 651,000 men, and first line reserves available upon mobilization exceed 1,500,000 men, it would appear that the forces directly under French control would exceed the combined strength of the forces at the disposal of the League even should every European country contribute a proportionate number under the French plan. Moreover, these contingents to be added to the League force on the outbreak of war would depend upon the good faith of each nation, which would be no more certain than it is in the present case of economic sanctions.

Although presumably the establishment of a League police would lead to a reduction in national armaments, the French plan makes no concrete proposals to this effect. The Soviet delegation contended that even if such a plan were adopted, each state would calcu-

47. "This internationalization of civil aviation is the necessary contention of the proposals which follow," *Proposals of the French Delegation*, Conf. D. 99, p. 23.

48. Lt.-Col. Vauthier, *Le Danger Aérien et l'Avenir du Pays* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1930); also Edward P. Warner, "Can Aircraft be Limited?" *Foreign Affairs*, April 1932.

49. This plan is advanced by Léon Blum, *Les Problèmes de la Paix* and also by Henry du Jouvenel, *New York Times*, November 20, 1931.

50. Conf. D. 99, p. 25.

late the strength of the international police force in formulating its own military requirements, and the plan might therefore perpetuate swollen armaments.

The French proposals were referred to the General Commission and the Political Commission for future discussion, and were mentioned only casually in the general speeches. A few states, such as Poland, Czechoslovakia and Rumania, which are allied to France, approved the principle of an international police force, while a majority, including the United States, refrained from comment. The prevailing view was that, while the project as a whole was impracticable at the present time, particularly in view of the fact that the United States and the Soviet Union are not members of the League, the fundamental issue of sanctions would have to be faced.⁵¹

THE SOVIET PROPOSAL FOR PROGRESSIVE DISARMAMENT

Another proposal which departed radically from the general scheme recommended by the Preparatory Commission was the Soviet plan for progressive and proportional reduction of armaments.⁵² This plan was the direct antithesis of the French proposal. It was based on the assumption that the only effective means of contributing to the progress of peace is the complete and rapid abolition of all armed forces "on the principle of equality for all." The Soviet proposal suggested the following proportional reductions:⁵³

1. For states with peace time forces over 200,000 men, 50 per cent reduction;
2. For states with peace time forces between 30,000 and 200,000 men, from 0 to 50 per cent reduction, according to the number of their effectives and to the scale of progressive and proportional reduction;
3. For states with peace time forces under 30,000 men, limitation at the present level;
4. The effectives of the armed land forces of the states disarmed as a result of the World War were not included in the above schedule and were to be fixed separately.

M. Litvinov confessed that he had "no illusions whatever as to the fate in store" for his proposal and declared that the Soviet delegation was ready to discuss any projects tending to reduce armaments, particularly proposals for the complete destruction of the most aggressive types of armaments. A Soviet resolution proposing to base the work of the Disarmament Conference "on the principle of general and complete disarmament" was rejected by the General Commission on February 25, virtually without debate.⁵⁴

51. The proposal of the French delegation merely referred to non-members of the League in a footnote, suggesting that an "international authority" be constituted to insure their co-operation. Conf. D. 99, p. 23.

52. For the previous proposals of the Soviet government, cf. League of Nations, Minutes of the Preparatory Commission, Fifth Session, C.155.M.50.1928.IX. p. 239-278.

53. Conf. D. 99, p. 35.

54. *Journal of the Conference*, cited, No. 22, February 26, 1932.

CONCLUSION

The United States did not play a dominant rôle during the first stage of the Conference. Prior to Secretary Stimson's brief visit to Geneva in April, the American delegation avoided the contentious question of security and remained aloof from the political issues dividing the chief European powers. In his opening statement Mr. Gibson, acting head of the American delegation, presented the following nine-point program intended to aid in carrying on the purposes of the Conference:

- ~1. Acceptance of the Draft Treaty as a basis for discussion.
- 2. The possibility of prolonging the existing naval agreements concluded at Washington and London after they have been completed by the adherence of France and Italy.
- 3. Proportional reductions from the figures laid down in the Washington and London agreements on naval tonnage as soon as all parties to the Washington agreement have entered this framework.
- 4. Total abolition of submarines.
- 5. Measures to protect civilian populations against aerial bombing.
- 6. Total abolition of lethal gases and bacteriological warfare.
- 7. The computation of the numbers of armed forces on the basis of the effectives necessary for the maintenance of internal order plus some suitable contingent for defense.
- 8. Special restrictions for tanks and heavy mobile guns as arms of peculiarly aggressive character.
- 9. Limitation of expenditure on material as a complementary method to direct limitation in that it may prove useful to prevent a qualitative race if and when quantitative limitation has been made effective.

In prefacing these proposals, Mr. Gibson declared:

"The new conception of national armaments has never been put into words in any of our commitments, but it is so implicit in their terms that it can be reduced almost to a formula. Every nation has not only the right but the obligation to its own people to maintain internal order. This obviously calls for an adequate military force for internal police work. Beyond and above this there is the obligation of each government to its people to maintain a sufficient increment of military strength to defend the national territory against aggression and invasion. We therefore have this formula dividing our military forces into two parts. Beyond this reasonable supplement to the police force we have taken an implicit obligation to restrict ourselves. Our problem is, therefore, to establish by honest scrutiny and agreement the margin that now exists beyond what is essential for the maintenance of internal order and defense of our territories. . . ."⁵⁶

This statement may be significant in view of the fact that Mr. Gibson implicitly excludes the use of military force to defend national interests on the high seas and in foreign countries. It is argued that should the

United States apply Mr. Gibson's doctrine literally, it could proceed at once to drastic reductions in its army and navy, regardless of what other powers did, and still leave the defense of its territory unimpaired.

In agreeing, moreover, to consider limitation of expenditure on material, the American delegation indicated its qualified acceptance of the principle of budgetary limitation—a principle which it had declined to accept in 1930.⁵⁷ By proposing that the Washington and London naval agreements should be extended, the United States apparently sought to avoid discussion of abolition or reduction in the size of battleships advocated by the other naval powers. In view of the fact that virtually all existing battleships will be overage by 1936, extension of the London agreement would tend to reduce the chances of new battleship construction in the future.

A great many proposals were submitted by the other delegations represented at the Conference. Some offered detailed projects which, if adopted, would modify the Draft Treaty in important respects; others advanced more general proposals or confined themselves to broad questions of principle, reserving definite proposals for a later stage of the discussions. Most of these projects, however, were designed to fit into the framework of the Draft Treaty or to extend its provisions in certain respects.⁵⁸

The chief task of the Disarmament Conference during the next few months will be to coordinate these proposals and the many suggestions put forward in the fifty speeches delivered in the first stage, and to draft a convention for the limitation and reduction of armaments acceptable to all countries.⁵⁹ Certain conditions are essential to the success of the Conference. It is evident from the preliminary discussion that no substantial reduction in armaments can be effected until the problem of equality has been solved and some provision made to strengthen existing measures for the preservation of peace. Not only France, but many other members of the League of Nations are convinced that the power of the League to suppress hostilities must be increased, whether or not the particular proposals of France are accepted. Recognition of the requirements of world security by the United States, as the most powerful non-member of the League, is essential to a solution of this problem.

57. League of Nations, Minutes of the Preparatory Commission, Sixth Session, Second Part, Fifth Meeting, C.4.M.4.1931.IX, p. 62.

58. For texts of the projects submitted in definite form, cf. Conf. D. 99.

59. Conf. D. 99.